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Habitat III European regional meeting

Note by the Secretariat

The secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) hereby transmits the outcome document of the Habitat III European regional meeting held in Prague, from 16 to 18 March 2016.

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Outcome document of the Habitat III European regional meeting

1. We, the national government delegations from the Member States of the Economic Commission for Europe region, as well as relevant stakeholders, including local and regional authorities, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations agencies, professionals and academia, the private sector, civil society, men, women, children, youth and other participants in the Habitat III European regional meeting held in Prague from 16 to 18 March 2016, adopt the present declaration.

2. We recall the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which provides a focus on cities through Goal 11 and other targets across the whole Agenda, as well as the Paris Agreement.

3. We acknowledge specific regional charters and strategies, such as the Geneva Charter on Sustainable Housing and the Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management in the Economic Commission for Europe Region for the Period 2014-2020.

4. We met to discuss the challenges and opportunities of providing access to adequate and affordable housing to all in liveable cities and sustainable urban development, ahead of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III).

5. We debated priorities for the New Urban Agenda and policy recommendations with a view to providing official input to the Habitat III preparatory process.

6. We recall General Assembly resolution 70/210 entitled "Implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)".

7. We, the participants in the Habitat III European regional meeting, express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Government of the Czech Republic for generously hosting the meeting and for its excellent organization, and we extend our gratitude to the city of Prague and its people for the warm hospitality accorded to all participants in the meeting.

8. We note the importance of promoting:

(a) **Innovative and productive cities**. There is a need to increase the attractiveness and liveability of cities, with a focus on innovation and adequate and affordable housing, to ensure gender equality and women's empowerment and to take into consideration youth and gender perspectives. Job creation should be promoted through enterprise-friendly conditions, while respecting the environment;

(b) **Green, compact, resource-efficient and resilient cities**. Cities that are green, better-integrated with nature, inclusive, liveable, compact and resilient are a priority in policies at all levels of government and in regional cooperation efforts, especially with respect to members of vulnerable groups, marginalized communities and people with special needs. There is a need to increase resource efficiency in the fields of energy, water, waste, land use and food, to mitigate the emissions of greenhouse gases, to improve air quality, to take care of wastewater in cities, to make cities resilient to climate change and other challenges, such as flooding, drought, heat waves and natural and man-made hazards, and to ensure a transition

towards safe and sustainable urban mobility and clean and accessible urban transport for all;

(c) **Inclusive and safe cities**. There is a need to address the causes of discrimination and inequalities, with a particular focus on human rights in cities in relation to gender equality, and of other forms of exclusion and unequal power relations, such as those based on race, ethnicity, culture, caste, class, age, ability or disability, sexual orientation or religion. This should include the progressive realization of the right to an adequate standard of living for all, including to adequate and affordable housing in accordance with States' obligations;

(d) **Good urban governance**. There is a need to improve urban governance by establishing and strengthening local democracy, participatory and multilevel governance, building the capacity of local authorities and all civil society actors, and implementing holistic and integrated strategies for sustainable urban development. Sustainable, inclusive and effective urban planning and management are a vehicle towards an improved quality of life for all people. This should take into consideration urban identity and local culture. There is a need to protect the character of cities and to value their history and traditions, in order to foster social cohesion and civic values and transmit a heritage to future generations. The empowerment of women and their full and equal participation in the economy are vital to achieving sustainable development and significantly enhance economic growth and productivity.

9. We stress that:

(a) There is a need to plan and manage urban areas through the cooperation of national Governments with regional and local authorities and communities within established coordination mechanisms. This should take into account the functional urban areas and metropolitan areas, as well as opportunities within the territories, building on urban and rural linkages;

(b) Cities need to be enabled and empowered in order to be key actors in the implementation of sustainable urban development based on the principles of sustainable development. To this end, local authorities, particularly through their local government associations, and citizens should be involved and consulted at all stages of the policy cycle, from planning to implementation, in a well-designed system of multilevel governance;

(c) There is a need to ensure compliance with legal requirements by independent institutions acting in land governance and land registration, ensuring security of tenure, transparent and efficient land use, property registration and a sound financial system as fundamental bases for sustainable, resilient and affordable housing and urban development;

(d) International cooperation and exchanges among national, regional and local authorities can promote sustainable economic development and social and environmental protection;

(e) Integrated and place-based support measures should be facilitated to enable cities and their surroundings to make the most of their potentials and address specific challenges, especially in relation to urban economies;

(f) There is a need for social cohesion, better access to services and facilities (green areas, public transport, primary health, education and culture) and urban safety;

(g) Long-term and non-speculative risk-informed investments in housing and urban development can stimulate employment in cities;

(h) Resource efficiency and the promotion of sustainable consumption and production patterns are elements critical to cities to manage growth, increase resource productivity and decouple economic growth from increased resource use and its environmental impact;

(i) Efforts to protect and safeguard the cultural and natural heritage contribute to the development of sustainable cities and communities;

(j) We consider affordability in cities a key factor in the quality of human life. It is also a major feature of liveable cities and promotes economic development and job creation. Planned urban development that minimizes environmental impacts can promote economic, social and environmental sustainability and prevent urban sprawl;

(k) Risk-informed urban development is a means to increase the resilience of cities against both natural and man-made hazards and related environmental, technological and biological risks, as well as their cascade effects.

Challenges to housing and sustainable urban development in the Economic Commission for Europe region

10. Our countries face multiple challenges, which are listed below.

(a) **Urban poverty**. The lack of affordable, adequate, accessible, habitable, resilient housing and homelessness are major problems. In some cities, the lack of public spaces, safe and accessible transport and basic public facilities and services, such as the supply of affordable energy to all, deprives residents of amenities and of a standard of living that should be available to all. Inadequate access to any of the basic services (water supply, sanitation, shelter, household energy, food security, health care, education and personal security) adversely affects the health of the population and inhibits economic growth. The growing of informal and substandard housing is becoming a reality, as those who cannot get into the housing market find themselves relegated to living in slums with poor infrastructure and inadequate basic services. In deprived urban areas, physical and economic regeneration activities require coherent and multidimensional approaches, particularly in the case of marginalized communities and individuals, whose effective integration requires employment, education, health care, housing and social integration. Housing investments envisaged in segregated neighbourhoods should be aimed at tackling the spatial and social isolation of marginalized communities, and interventions should follow the principles of non-segregation and desegregation. The increasing duality of the labour markets changes the patterns of employment, favouring those with more added value to the economy over those with traditional, low value-adding jobs. This contributes significantly to an increase in social and spatial inequalities. Growing inequalities and the lack of affordable and accessible housing for low- and medium-income strata may lead to urban sprawl, while the lack of public spaces and

transport deprives residents of amenities and of an adequate standard of living that should be accessible to all.

(b) **Demographic changes**. Important demographic changes, such as ageing and migration, that have taken place in the last decades need to be addressed. An ageing population has become a significant issue, with the majority of housing being ill-equipped to cater for this growing group. Poor housing conditions have a direct effect on the physical and mental health of the population. This justifies the need to provide adequate and healthy housing. The growing proportion of ageing people in the population increases the costs of health care and the burden on the welfare systems. Moreover, the majority of housing and public urban spaces are not well adapted to the ageing population or, in some other Member States, to the increasing urban youth population, which poses challenges in terms of adequate and affordable housing and infrastructure. Migration has led to an increased diversity in many cities, a process that boosts social innovation but also brings along challenges in terms of social cohesion that require adequate policy responses.

(c) **Climate change and disaster risk**. There is a strong relation among climate change, disaster-risk mitigation and spatial planning, public transport, mobility and housing. Member States, in cooperation with local and regional governments, should seek to mitigate and adapt to climate change reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases through city-based actions. This can include, among other measures, ensuring that buildings are energy-efficient and that the share of renewables is increased. Housing stock, buildings and vital infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools and workplaces, as well as public transport facilities should be made low-carbon and resilient to both natural and man-made hazards and related environmental, technological and biological hazards and risks, as well as their cascade effects on infrastructure, economic assets and livelihoods. Cities should aim at preventing water-related disasters through the establishment of emergency plans and awareness-raising. Sustainable food systems are fundamental to safe, inclusive and resilient communities, while urban areas face high levels of food waste, which are expected to rise as urbanization continues.

(d) **Urban growth and urban sprawl**. If not controlled, urban growth can lead to urban sprawl. Member States should prevent its negative impact on the environment through the strategic planning of human settlements in a polycentric and balanced territorial development with efficient and safe multimodal transport systems. In preventing urban sprawl, we must also consider the cost of urban densification using the existing urban structure and preserving the habitability of the urban environment.

(e) **Coordination in urban development**. Planning strategies and tools need to be implemented to ensure more balanced relations between the public and private sectors. Cooperation in urban planning and management among different levels of Government, communities, local non-governmental organizations and the private sector should be encouraged. This entails enacting measures at the national, regional and local levels to ensure that policies are appropriate for each level of governance, thereby guaranteeing the most effective results. This includes the need for all key stakeholders and inhabitants to participate in the decision-making process related to urban planning, as they would be affected by developments in housing.

(f) **Urban regeneration**. The overestimation of the technical aspects of building construction and urban planning (including green technologies) can

compromise the social sustainability and cultural adequacy of housing solutions, as well as the preservation of a city's tangible and intangible cultural heritage, which carries the memory and identity of its inhabitants over generations. A balanced approach to urban regeneration should consider social cohesion and the urban environment. In this regard, local planning at the level of neighbourhoods is essential to create vibrant communities and liveable cities. The approach should provide public spaces as a key element affecting the quality of life and the identity of the inhabitants of a city.

(g) **Relevant use of technology**. Progress in technologies and the availability of data is rapidly changing our lives and the way we organize them. Urban planners should adopt relevant technological innovations that allow for a more effective use of available data. This requires educating and building the capacity of urban managers, decision makers and inhabitants. Open and disaggregated data are a critical component in transparent and effective governance as well as in the provision of efficient environmental and energy services in urban settings. Every effort must be made to keep shared data accessible to the public, while protecting the privacy of individuals. Cities should consider simple, interoperable and comparable data markers and standards for data collection. Data should also be transparent and openly accessible for its exploitation as a tool to increase people's ownership and engagement. The technological and digital divide in urban planning and management has to be addressed.

Key directions from Prague to Quito

11. We should address the above challenges through an integrated approach to sustainable urban development, setting out effective actions to tackle the economic, environmental, climatic, demographic, social and cultural challenges affecting urban areas. Cities should be "people-centred" and enhance conditions for well-being, development and the realization of the human rights of all inhabitants. In particular, there is a need for the following.

(a) Innovative and productive cities

We support strengthening cities' endogenous potential for innovation, including social innovation and job creation through ensuring an enabling business environment, transparent and predictable local policies and regulations on land security. Infrastructure, adequate and affordable housing and markets supporting local economic development should be in place, as well as employment and decent work for all, including young populations, while respecting the environment and strengthening equity and social integration. Enhancing economic growth across socioeconomic sectors should go hand in hand with measures to improve urban resilience, including the transition towards the circular and green economy. It should stimulate rural-urban production, supply chains and cities' food security, among others, to promote a sustainable urban metabolism that will reduce urban inequalities and urban-rural tensions;

(b) Green, compact, resource-efficient and resilient cities

We support cities in their efforts to make the best use of natural resources, including through spatial planning, and to focus on resource efficiency in relation to

energy, water, raw materials, such as concrete, metals and minerals, and land, including through effective land management, in order to prevent urban sprawl and strengthen the "multiple use of space" principle. We also support climate change adaptation and mitigation measures and cities' resilience to floods, heat waves and natural and man-made hazards. Urbanizing deltas, in this respect, are facing extreme and specific challenges because of the combination of socioeconomic and natural environmental dynamics. We encourage the use of green and blue infrastructure as well as nature-based solutions, in addition to hard preventive infrastructure and spatial planning, as a tool to prevent disasters, in particular water-related ones, from having a big impact;

(c) Inclusive and safe cities

- We encourage addressing urban poverty and exclusion by addressing, reducing and preventing the root causes and effects of inequalities and conflict through inclusive decision-making, equal access to affordable housing, the transparent and efficient provision of basic services and facilities, including water supply and sanitation, mobility and public and green spaces, and safeguarding tenure security. The New Urban Agenda should also aim at creating a dialogue and conflict mediation among and within communities, tackling all forms of discrimination against women and children and addressing the specific needs of members of vulnerable groups, including refugees and other groups of migrants. Specific attention should be given to women's empowerment and intercultural and intergenerational dialogue. Cities are places where disparities and inequalities are concentrated, as well as places where different cultures may coexist, where ethnic diversity may become a source of innovation and renewal, and where social mobility is possible;
- Accessible, safe, inclusive and good-quality public spaces and safe transportation should be provided to foster urban equity, social cohesion and a better quality of life, with particular attention to the needs of men, women, children, elderly persons and persons with disabilities;
- We support promoting improved access to basic services allowing sustainable growth and job creation, with particular attention to the empowerment of women and better gender equality;

(d) Good urban governance

We support:

- The elaboration of country-specific and evidence-based policy guidance and recommendations on challenges related to housing, urban development and land management through regional and thematic studies;
- Using research and innovation, developing in-depth assessments and reports to increase the knowledge and availability of data based on country specificity, and fostering open access to data and knowledge, leading to the harmonization of definitions, methodologies, indicators and standards, both at the regional and international levels, and ensuring effective monitoring;
- Promoting dialogue between all levels of governance and relevant stakeholders, creating, when applicable, and supporting existing local, national, regional and transnational networks, platforms and institutions,

facilitating the exchange of experiences and the sharing of good practices, including city-to-city cooperation;

- Promoting national urban policies, as appropriate, which are conducive to sustainable urban development and foster territorial cohesion, and their translation into localized urban legislation and regulations, respecting, where appropriate, the principle of subsidiarity;

- Strengthening the use of spatial planning and the design of urban extensions, infilling and regeneration ensuring a bottom-up and multilevel governance, as well as integrated approaches involving all stakeholders and the inhabitants. Cooperative mechanisms for spatial planning and steering in metropolitan areas beyond administrative boundaries should be strengthened and supported by integrated spatial strategies to ensure a balanced territorial development;

- Stressing that, in order to be effective, approaches may have to be locality-specific and therefore varied, given the diversity of the countries, economies, societies and cultures in the region, and especially promoting the design and implementation of national urban policies according to a "place-based" approach;

- Supporting and building the capacity of local authorities, a key element for the sustainable development of urban areas. This could be done by promoting decentralized cooperation among local authorities, empowering all concerned levels of governance to tackle social, economic, environmental and demographic urban development challenges in an integrated manner, establish legislative frameworks and consolidate shared knowledge bases;

- Focusing on land management and land access as a prerequisite for sustainable urban development, as well as ensuring sustainable financing models that guarantee the public benefit of increases in land values and the mobilization of urban development capital gains in favour of land-use planning;

- Building accountability and the regular monitoring of the coherent implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, with a special focus on Goal 11 and other targets across the 2030 Agenda, using the relevant indicators defined. This should include regionally specific agreements and strategies on data collection and analyses. Data should be gathered using common international standards to ensure that they are compatible among Member States. They should, as much as possible, be publicly available to support policymaking, research and economic development. Lastly, global and regional data repositories should be further developed to support the policymaking process;

- Supporting sound municipal finances so that cities can provide needs-oriented services to their inhabitants. This includes facilitating enhanced access by local authorities to financial resources, including strengthening their own source revenues by establishing and improving revenue generation and collection systems at the subnational level, improving access to national financial allocations, as well as facilitating access to capital markets and attracting domestic and foreign direct investment;

- A modern legislation and appropriate monitoring institutions, which are crucial for fair competition in the market to avoid land and housing-market speculations;

- Enabling, entitling and empowering cities to act on the principles of sustainable development and to be key actors in the implementation of sustainable urban development. To this end, local authorities, particularly through their representative local government associations, and citizens should be involved and consulted at all stages of the policy cycle, from planning to implementation, in a well-designed system of multilevel governance.